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Journal Title:

Volume: Issue:

Month/Year: Pages: 15 pages

Odyssey

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Article Title: Boss elections or the workers vote ;
capitalist democracy or a workers government.

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CAPITALIST ELECTION DEMOCRACY A FAKE*

We have been taught that any American boy has a chance to become President; that we must vote for the best man in elections and that usually, in the long run, the best man wins; that the crooks in government are sooner or later driven out of office by the good people of the community; that the system of elections and the system of voting in the United States is the most democratic in the world.

When anyone says that all this is a lie, that it is far from the truth, that our whole system is nothing but sham democracy, then the Fourth of July orators, the press, the radio and the pulpit say that such a man is a dangerous radical, a red who should be deported. But if this radical can produce facts instead of fancy, proof that tears aside falsehoods and demonstrates the folly of blind faith, then we should listen to him and learn what he has to say.

The Revolutionary Workers League of the United States, fighting for the interests of the vast majority of the population of the country—the working class and poor farmers—asks you to read its program on the election campaign. If you are biased and have your mind already made up, if you “know it all”, then the best thing to do so is to throw this away. But if you are a worker who wants to better the lot of the working class and your family and yourself, then we ask you to listen to the revolutionary workers’ point of view.

*Published in the FIGHTING WORKER, July 1st, 1936, under the title, Capitalist Democracy a Fraud.

The backbone of the voting population in the United States is composed of the middle class, and not, as the exploiters would have us believe, the working class which is the majority of the population. For example:

- 1—Millions of Negro workers under Jim Crow oppression are disfranchised;
 - 2—Millions of foreign born workers who do the hardest labor from which the bosses reap big profits are disfranchised;
 - 3—Millions of youths between 17 and 21, old enough to work but not old enough to vote are disfranchised;
 - 4—Millions of native born unemployed workers, transient workers, poverty-stricken workers who move from precinct to precinct and ward to ward or from town to town, are disfranchised;
 - 5—Millions of other workers, disgusted with the crooked politicians, refuse to register or go to the polls and boycott the elections;
 - 6—The majority of the soldiers and sailors can fight for the nation but cannot vote because they are away from home.
- If these millions do not vote, then who does vote?
- 1—The small property owning middle class in the cities and the country constitutes the backbone of the American voters;
 - 2—The various layers of the capitalist class;
 - 3—The workers employed on city, county, state and government jobs who must vote as their political bosses tell them; the workers employed in company towns and company controlled communities; and the workers who are capitalist from the eyebrows up and slaves from the eyebrows down;

- 4—The big cemetery vote, the big graveyard vote list of the politicians, the paid voters of the ward bosses, and the padded lists.

But the above is only a surface sore of the sham democracy in elections in the United States. What about the difficulties encountered by a workers' ticket which is to be placed on the ballot? Leaving aside the obvious fact that a workers' party does not have the millions and millions of dollars in campaign funds and gratuitous services which the capitalists have for utilizing the press, radio, movies, church and jobs, we will only mention the difficulties encountered in obtaining a place on the ballot.

To place a workers' ticket on the ballot the working class must overcome drastic state election laws. Each state has different laws.

Election commissions in most cases use a dozen methods to disqualify the workers' ticket after it has complied with the laws to obtain signatures, etc.

Expensive primaries and an expensive election system make it impossible for a workers' party with a small campaign fund to comply with these regulations and enter tickets in the 48 states.

If the workers' ticket hurdles the first series of obstacles which the capitalist government has built and obtains a place on the ballot, a whole new series of obstacles confront it.

The majority of votes are thrown out by the vote-counters who are paid agents of the enemy parties.

It is not possible to obtain watchers for every polling place.

Even where the workers' revolutionary party obtains poll watchers many votes are challenged and in this way disqualified.

And finally when the revolutionary workers' ticket gains a place on the ballot and obtains enough votes to elect a member to office, the capitalist politicians who are in control usually count out these votes and steal the election.

If and when this hurdle is also overcome along with the rest (gaining a place on the ballot, gaining enough acknowledged votes to elect a member of the workers' party, preventing the politicians from stealing the election, etc.,) then, when the representative of the exploited is in office, a whole new series of hurdles again confront the workers' party. Behind the law of the land and its million or more phases of judicial interpretation to back it up stands the armed might of the exploiters.

The whole system of parliamentarism, the system of government in the United States, is organized and built to serve the needs and interests of the capitalist class. As long as the workers play the game of parliamentarism, a game in which the cards are stacked against them, the capitalists speak of the sacredness of "democracy" and bourgeois parliament. But as soon as the workers gain sufficient organized might to seriously consider taking over state power the exploiters drop their democratic mask (Italy, Germany, etc., etc.) and resort to open dictatorship and brutal suppression of the working class. In those cities, sections and states where the organized strength of the workers is great enough to gain more pay and less hours, over and over again the bosses and their government resort to martial law and a reign of terror against organized labor. Without economic freedom there can be no political freedom.

In place of the capitalist dictatorship over the workers the working class must establish its rule. Through

its dictatorship over the exploiters it will insure democracy for the working class. The working class cannot obtain power through elections and voting its representatives into office. The working class can establish its rule only by the overthrow of the capitalist system and all the institutions which have been organized to defend it.

The Revolutionary Workers League participates in elections in order to expose the capitalist system of exploitation, in order to expose the dictatorship of the capitalists, in order to expose sham democracy, in order to help the workers draw the necessary lessons to enable them to establish a Workers Government based upon Workers Councils.

The party of the working class that will accomplish the above ends can do so only on the basis of using its participation in elections, and its representatives in office as an auxiliary to the mass struggles of the class outside of parliament. To promise the workers reforms through the exploiters' state is to lead the working class into the trap of the class enemy. The lot of the working class cannot be improved through "parliament". The working class can improve its conditions, by relying only upon its own force in the day-to-day class struggle which is its training ground for the final struggle to overthrow capitalism and set up a Workers Government.

The Workers Vote Election^{*}

The State formally is the representative of the entire population of the country, but in reality it represents the interests of only one class—the ruling class. It is the organized political and physical power in the hands of the exploiting class for the defense of their property rights and for the oppression of the exploited class. This fact may be more or less hidden for a time by “democratic” forms such as a republican form of government, universal suffrage, a bill of rights, a theoretical equality before the law and so on—but the true nature of the state becomes obvious whenever the struggle between the classes reaches a stage in which the ruling class is—or thinks it is—in danger of being overthrown. Then all democratic forms are swiftly discarded. The Weimar Constitution of Germany was replaced by the Nazi dictatorship, the parliamentarianism of Italy was replaced by the Fascist Corporate State. In these substitutions neither the State nor its role lost its former essence. It remained what it was, the means of oppression in the hand of the ruling class but without the mask of democracy.

Even in countries where the rule of the exploiters is masked by democracy, the mask is very transparent. In the United States we have “democracy”. But the means of information and propaganda, are largely in the hands of the ruling class. The machinery for elections is under the control of the ruling class. How the votes are counted and discounted depends upon the

ruling class. All the rules and regulations are laid down by the ruling class. Millions of Negroes are disfranchised. Millions of foreign born workers are excluded from the elections. Millions of native workers, on the go in search of jobs and thereby having no legal residence for the specified period of time in the state and district where they are located on the day of elections, are deprived the right to vote. Millions of young workers are denied the right to vote because they are not of legal age, though old enough to be exploited by the ruling class.

If in spite of all these handicaps, the workers succeed in electing a few representatives of their own, what then? What or who can prevent the ruling class from throwing out such representatives, as the Socialist Assemblymen were thrown out of the assembly of the State of New York years ago? So long as you have the way the exploiters want you to vote, you may have the right. But if you vote against them they can disfranchise you as millions of us are disfranchised.

The workers can achieve freedom and security only by overthrowing the capitalist state and the whole capitalist system. But we can never overthrow capitalism if we limit ourselves to the legal framework of the capitalist state and submit to the rules laid down by our exploiters.

Then why participate at all in an election campaign? For the purpose of revolutionary propaganda and agitation, to expose in action the bourgeois system to the class. How shall we participate in elections organized by the capitalists against the workers? The Revolutionary Workers League says—through the Workers Vote.

We propose to set up parallel to the voting system of the capitalists a Workers Vote against capitalism.

^{*}Published in the FIGHTING WORKER, June 18th, 1936, under the title, The Workers Vote.

We propose to organize a vote of ALL workers in the United States, regardless of color, sex, citizenship in the United States, residence qualifications worked out by the capitalists, etc. Only the exploited workers, poorest farmers, etc. will be able to vote. And all those who toil who are over seventeen will be able to vote. Bosses and their direct agents will be ineligible. The workers will be asked to vote for candidates who stand on the platform of the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' government.

In this way the vote of ALL workers, those permitted to vote by the capitalists and those disbarred, will be given an opportunity to vote against capitalism for a workers' world. And the sham democracy of capitalism can be exposed in the light of all workers.

Today we are weak and can put this proposition to work only on a modest scale. But as we grow in influence and size we can apply it more widely until it becomes a powerful instrument in the hands of the workers against the capitalists.

As an auxiliary tactic, where possible, the workers will be asked to write in on the regular ballots in the capitalist election the names of the candidates in the Workers Vote election. And when we are strong enough we can and will run candidates in the capitalist elections too. But in all such cases parallel with the vote of our candidates in the capitalist election will go the Workers Vote for these and other candidates in the Workers Vote election.

This is a new idea. It is a revolutionary idea and will enable the revolutionists in the United States to make full use of the fake democracy of the American capitalists in the interests of the working class and the revolution. We are confident it will strike responsive chords in the thinking and sentiments of workers everywhere.

Because it is new there must be many questions about it. Workers are invited to write to the *Fighting Worker* for further information and also to tell us what they think about it. Future issues of the *Fighting Worker* will discuss other aspects of the question.

WORKERS VOTE ELECTION PROGRAM*

The workers of the United States must organize on a class struggle basis as the first step in the fight:

For the six hour day, five day week, and no reduction in pay.

For unemployment and social insurance to be paid for by the capitalists and their government. For work relief at a thirty dollar a week minimum wage.

For economic, social and political equality for the Negro masses.

For the coordination of free education and practical vocational training for all youth; for equal pay for equal work; for independent relief for all youth, equal to the adult.

For immediate complete independence for the colonies and protectorates of the United States. For democratic rights; for the right to organize, strike and picket.

*Published in the *FIGHTING WORKER*, July 1st, 1936.

The workers must struggle for these demands today in order to better their living conditions, and in order to prepare for bigger struggles tomorrow, for the struggle for power. Partial gains through victories of the working class today cannot solve the problem of the oppressed. Only the establishment of a Workers Government in the United States and workers control of production can remedy the problems confronting the working class and the oppressed masses.

The working class must fight imperialist war with civil war and must work for the defeat of its "own" imperialist armies and navies in the war.

The workers must establish a Workers Government. The workers can accomplish this only by overthrowing American Imperialism, by smashing the rule of the exploiters, by establishing in its place Workers Councils.

The Workers Government will expropriate the expropriators, will socialize industry, will be a dictatorship against the exploiters to insure workers democracy. Under this new government the workers will carry on production for use instead of for profit, will organize production on a higher level to insure abundance for all, will eliminate poverty, unemployment and wars, will establish a workers state, cooperate with the Soviet Union, and will lay the basis for a world communist society by giving material support to the revolutionary movement throughout the rest of the world

A Workers Government can be obtained only by the independent political action of the working class, through a party of the workers, completely independent of all other parties. This party must be an international party, a party of Marxism, a communist party.

THE U. S. CONSTITUTION*

Since a growing revolutionary mood of the American working class had been successfully dissipated through the various relief measures of Roosevelt's New Deal, at the cheap price of a few billion dollars, and since the profits of the big corporations, are growing again by leaps and bounds, the big capitalists are recovering from their fright and begin to feel confident that they will be able to cope with the situation without any New Deal. President Roosevelt and Congress not being agreeable, Big Business took the matter into its own hands by utilizing its most reliable instrument, the Supreme Court unmaking the New Deal laws, by declaring them unconstitutional, as fast as Congress is making them. The NRA and the AAA, these cornerstones in the structure of the New Deal, having been dropped into the Potomac and sunk without a trace, the whole structure of the New Deal is collapsing.

No wonder there is a growing demand in the camp of the New Dealers for a constitutional amendment depriving the

*Published in the FIGHTING WORKER, March 1st, 1936, under the title, Amend the U. S. Constitution or overthrow Capitalism?

Supreme Court of the right to nullify a law enacted by Congress. In the camp of the Old Dealers the hue and cry is raised about the sacrosanctity of the Supreme Court and the Constitution. For Hearst, the Supreme-Court is a depository of the accumulated wisdom of the ages; for Al Smith, the Constitution is the Civic Bible of the American people. Both contentions may be contested by the fact that here are a large number of dissenting opinion and the Constitution was amended about a score of times, but that is beside the point. What is of interest to us is this: could we, a class of wage slaves, exploited and oppressed, be helped through constitutional amendments? Could our living conditions be bettered, could we overthrow the profit system, could we emancipate ourselves by amending the Constitution of the United States? Let us look into this question.

The Constitution is the basic law of the State, and the capitalist state is an instrument in the hands of the capitalist class for the oppression of the toiling masses. In a class society the government is the executive committee for the ruling class. The exploiters are not a homogenous class. The small capitalists, the big industrialists, the financiers are motivated by conflicting interests, each stratum struggling for control of the Government to promote its own special interests. But they would stand united against a constitutional amendment that would deprive them of their capitalist "right" to exploit the workers. The capitalist rule over the workers can be overthrown only by a revolution of the workers. History knows of no fundamental social change achieved by any method except revolution. The Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery, did not mean more than strengthening the economic position of industrial capitalists of the North at the expense of the agricultural capitalists of

the South, but it took four years of a bloody civil war to enforce the amendment.

Nothing is more dangerous for the workers than the illusion that they can legislate the oppressors out of power through the very instrument of oppression, the capitalist state. The German Socialist had that illusion, the capitalist fascism. The Austrian Socialists had the same illusion. They now have fascism. The Italian workers thought that it was quite sufficient to occupy the factories; they ignored the capitalist state, but they were not ignored by it. They were crushed and now have fascism.

What if the Supreme Court, one branch of the capitalist government, is deprived of certain power and the same power is turned over to the legislative or executive branch of the same capitalist government? It may make a difference to the various groups of capitalists fighting for control of the government, but it leaves us, workers, an oppressed and exploited class.

Not a constitutional amendment, but the organized revolutionary force is the instrument for the emancipation of the workers from wage slavery and exploitation.

The proposals of the Stalinists and the Socialist "militants" for constitutional amendments is the worst form of Parliamentarism.

The abolition of the Constitution through the overthrow of American imperialism is the only food for the working class.